

Georgia Department of Human Resources

EARLY INTERVENTION BECAUSE BABIES CAN'T WAIT

Why is early intervention important?

Babies develop so quickly. Half of their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual growth takes place in the first few years of life. These early years are the critical foundation for later learning.

Each year in Georgia, more than 10,000 babies are born with, or later develop, conditions that affect normal growth and learning. Without early help, even conditions that are mild in the beginning can become severe as a child grows older. With early intervention, a child who is developing slowly has a greater chance of reaching his or her developmental potential.

Studies show that for every \$1 spent on early intervention, \$7 can be saved on additional services that might otherwise be needed later in the child's life.

What is Babies Can't Wait/early intervention?

The Babies Can't Wait (BCW) early intervention system begins with a complete evaluation and assessment of the child's development. If the child has a significant developmental delay or disability, the next step is to identify the child's developmental needs and the family's priorities for their child. Appropriate services are identified and are provided in a manner that supports parents and other primary caregivers in incorporating activities throughout the child and family's daily activities and routines in order to increase everyday learning opportunities for each child.

Georgia's Babies Can't Wait Early Intervention System has been fully implemented since August 1994. During the past year the program has helped over 7,200 children.

What services are made available?

Every child enrolled in BCW has an Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), based on the results of evaluations, assessments, and the family's concerns related to their child's development. The plan includes goals for the child and family, services needed to meet the goals, and resources to help the family pay for services. State funds may be available to assist families who the district Public Health office finds cannot pay for services. Evaluation, assessments and service coordination are offered to families at no cost.

When the IFSP is completed, children who are eligible for early intervention are linked with services available in their area. BCW teaches parents how to work with their child, counsels them about special problems, links them to support groups, and helps with transportation to services, if needed.

The FY 2003 budget for BCW is \$18.9 million (\$10.5 in state funds and \$8.4 in federal funds).

Who is eligible?

Children, from birth to their third birthday, regardless of income, may be eligible one of two ways: 1) Children are automatically eligible if they are diagnosed with certain mental or physical conditions, including but not limited to: Down's syndrome, fetal alcohol syndrome, spina bifida, cerebral palsy, and autism; or 2) Children who are experiencing significant delays in their development may be eligible – for example, children who are very far behind their peers in learning to turn over, crawl, walk, or talk, or children with emotional, speech, or hearing problems.

How to contact Babies Can't Wait?

Anyone who suspects that a child may be delayed in his/her development can call a toll-free number to find the closest BCW office: 1-800-229-2038. In Atlanta the number is 770-451-5484. Parents can ask to speak to another parent whose child has a similar disability. The state BCW office number is 404-657-2726 or 1-888-651-8224.